

AIR WAR COLLEGE

AIR UNIVERSITY

ARTICULATION BEYOND THE BUMPER STICKER:
REVAMPING AN INCOMPLETE
AND CONFUSING MASTER TENET

by

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Biography

Colonel Rolanda Burnett is currently a student enrolled in Air War College, at Air University, Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama.

After his commissioning in 1989, he attended Specialized Undergraduate Navigator Training at Mather Air Force Base, California. Upon graduation, Colonel Burnett was assigned to the 912th Air Refueling Squadron, Robins Air Force Base, Georgia where he deployed in support of multiple operations to include DESERT CALM and RESTORE HOPE. Colonel Burnett was reassigned to Kadena Air Base, Japan. His duties included Chief of Navigation Training, Standardization and Evaluation / Instructor Navigator, and Flight Commander / Instructor Navigator. He was reassigned to Altus Air Force Base, Oklahoma and served in the 54th and 55th Air Refueling Squadrons as Combat Crew Training School (CCTS) Instructor navigator, Executive Officer, Flight Commander and Chief CCTS evaluator navigator.

Colonel Burnett was selected to attend the Army's Command and General Staff College (CGSC) graduating in June of 2001. While at CGSC he was selected to attend the School of Advanced Airpower Studies (SAAS), Maxwell AFB, Alabama and graduated in June of 2002. Colonel Burnett was assigned to the 609th Combat Plans Squadron, Headquarters 9th Air Force and United States Central Command Air Forces. Colonel Burnett was pivotal in developing and executing the air campaign strategy in support of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM .

Colonel Burnett then commanded the 705th Training Squadron, 505th Command and Control Group, 505th Command and Control Wing, Hurlburt Field, Florida.

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Introduction

The United States Air Force (USAF) should adjust its time-honored master tenet for the employment of airpower: centralized control and decentralized execution (CC&DE). This thesis has nothing to do with the master tenet's validity. This Mosaic-law equivalent remains as valid today as when our air power forefathers divined it amidst their operational context. It is, nonetheless, incomplete. The United States conducts air operations over a wide spectrum of conflict that can produce many and varied conditions. Correspondingly, the military has adapted. From counterinsurgency operations to thermo-nuclear deterrence, America's strength has been an ability to create flexibility to respond effectively to the types of wars it may face. Why then, should the USAF assume its master tenet is the right approach to all operational contexts? Many airmen view the master tenet as the only way to employ air and space power; however, restrictive doctrine and thinking has contributed to the master tenet's unenviable status as a "Bumper Sticker."

This paper begins by considering why centralized control dominates an airman's thinking. It then analyzes the doctrinal history of centralized control from 1954 to 2010. Next, it considers the impact of different operational contexts on the USAF's master tenet. By analyzing current and past doctrine and differing operational contexts the paper identifies key doctrinal strengths and weaknesses. Finally, the paper draws conclusions about the master tenet and makes recommendations for improvement.

Why Centralized Control Dominates Airmen's Thinking

What is the basis for an airman's total commitment to this age-old edict? Some may argue the airman's allegiance stems from fear...fear of losing the status of an independent service. Centralized control holds a special place in the history of air power. It underpinned the argument that led to an independent US air force in 1947. Therefore, if an airman compromises—even one iota—on the master tenet it would be tantamount to undermining the value of an independent USAF. Most would agree that air power has come of age in the last sixty-three years based on the experiences in WWII,¹ Korea, Vietnam and Iraq, and that the chances of returning the USAF back to the Army slim to none. Nevertheless, dogged defense of centralized control may, in part, be explained by the fear of losing independence. Paranoia is not the only explanation for an airman's loyalty to the master tenet.

The origins for such loyalty can be traced back to lessons learned by early air power practitioners. As a result of the British experience prior to and during WWII and the US experience during WWII, airmen would conclude—and rightly so—centralization (command and control) was the foundation to effective air power operations.

British Experience

Following the Battle of France in 1940, numerous events shaped Britain's approach to the employment of air power. The Battle of Britain, lessons learned in North Africa, numerous exercises and technological advances all contributed to Britain's approach to joint operations. During the fall of 1940, exercises in Northern Ireland resulted in air support controls which embodied the technical and organizational means to enhance support of ground forces. Another development emphasized co-located army-air headquarters and a signals network that linked

¹ Many lessons were learned in North Africa, Europe and the Pacific theaters.

forward and rear airfields with the joint army-air headquarters and with deployed divisions and brigades of the army. Sorting out the best of the emerging systems led to delays. Even more daunting was trying it out in the crucible of battle against the Germans in North Africa during WW II. However, once fully developed it proved effective. A hybrid of the two systems, developed by Air Marshalls Arthur William Tedder and Arthur “Mary” Coningham, gained acceptance in the summer of 1942.²

During Operations Compass and Crusader, autumn of 1940 through the winter of 1941-42, offensive operations against Italian forces in Libya defending Egypt, British Airman learned that co-locating with army headquarters and leveraging technological advances in communications allowed air power’s flexibility to gain air superiority which enabled air power to be effective in the ground-support role by massing air power at a decisive point. The new doctrine proved far superior to German Blitzkrieg.³

“The success achieved is correctly attributed to the system devised by Air Chief Marshall Arthur Tedder and Air Vice Marshall Arthur Coningham, but the system alone was not antecedent to successful operations...continuous and intimate collaboration between Coningham and Montgomery [Eighth Army commander] accounts for the triumphant application of airpower”⁴ in North Africa’s Western Desert in 1942. The British learned that properly employing air power in its different roles at the right place and time and in the right amount was far more advantageous than dividing air power up between the land commanders. Air power’s ability to “morph” during operations would not materialize if shackled by a ground commander who is: 1) unable to think outside the ground force limitations and; 2) only concerned with his “fight” and unable to consider the theater-wide picture, thus unable to take advantage of

² David Ian Hall, *Learning How to Fight Together*, (Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama: 2009), 1-13

³ Hall, 14-15

⁴ Ibid.

opportunities to influence the fight outside of his geographic “box.” In order to realize these advantages, airmen needed a mechanism to wield air power in a way that could leverage its flexibility. The mechanism was central control, in the form of an airman who **commanded** air assets and was co-equal and preferably co-located with the ground commander. The lessons learned and executed by the British, sadly, were not initially incorporated by the Americans and British during Operation Torch, the massive operation intended to remove the Axis forces from Northern Africa that started in November 1942.

American Experience

The initial foray by the Americans and British into joint and combined operations was bounded by an untested American air power doctrine; FM 31-35, *Aviation in Support of Ground Operations*. On paper it looked sound, with “a comprehensive tactical air control system: a central air command, a sophisticated network of ASC [air-support control] centres and various levels of communications between the ground and air forces.”⁵ However, it had not been exercised. The doctrine’s emphasis on corps-level support and the ground commander’s decision authority for target priority and selection led to dispersion and subordination of air assets to the “narrow close-support interests of the ground commanders.”⁶ Despite Britain’s successful air operations in the Western Desert, Operation Torch planners did not consult with chief architects, Tedder and Coningham, for advice. As a result, air assets were spread throughout the close battle putting up an “air umbrella” (flying artillery) to protect ground units, preventing air power from massing decisively. Strategic targets such as enemy aerodromes and ports, which could have a more significant long-term effect on overall operations were not

⁵ Hall, 21.

⁶ Ibid.

considered high-priority and thus not engaged. To quote Brig Gen Elwood “Pete” Quesada, Commander, 12th Fighter Command Commander at the time, “There was an abundance of ignorance” from US Army Air Corp airmen during Operation TORCH.⁷ In contrast, Rommel massed Axis air assets and was able to gain air superiority by outnumbering Allied forces at decisive points. With air superiority, Rommel was able to erode Allied defense in depth of key airfields and supply depots on the Algerian coast. Allied forces used two mountain ranges and its key passes to form defense in depth. By mid-February 1943, Rommel had driven Allied forces from the first mountain range called the Eastern Dorsal and was advancing toward the second mountain range called the Western Dorsal and one of its key passes, Kasserine. It was during the Kasserine crisis that a number of things changed.⁸

Allied forces reorganized based on recent changes proposed at the Casablanca conference in January, 1943. In essence, lessons learned by the British were implemented. Air power was controlled centrally, by an airman who was co-equal with the ground commander. The Northwest African Air Force was established and commanded by Gen Carl Spaatz supported by Vice Air Marshall Arthur Coningham, who commanded a sub-element called Northwest African Tactical Air Force (NATAF). With control of air power, Vice Air Marshall Coningham halted umbrella missions and concentrated forces against targets that enabled gaining air superiority. With air superiority, NATAF gained the upper hand as it punished Rommel while he surprisingly retreated to the Eastern Dorsal after 20 February 1943. Operation Torch tactics changed to fit the UK model and eventually resulted in wholesale embracement of UK doctrine by the US in

⁷ Quesada, Elwood R. Lt Gen (ret), Interviewed by Col William R. Carter ,USAF, Lt Col Price Bingham, USAF, J. A. Mowbray, Ph. D, Lt Col(ret) David McIsaac, USAF and Charles Westenhof, Fall 1990. Maxwell AFB, Alabama. (Personal collection of J.A. Mowbray, Ph. D)

⁸ Shawn P. Rife, “Kasserine Pass and the Proper Application of Power”, *Joint Force Quarterly*, no 20 (Fall and Winter, 1998-1999) 71-77

the form of FM 100-20.⁹ “In short, the Americans adopted the British doctrine in toto” and Axis powers surrendered to US and British commanders two months after Operation Torch adapted these new command relationships.¹⁰

North Africa 1943—An MCO

FM 100-20, *Command and Employment of Air Power*, is most certainly a product of its environment. The environment was total or unlimited in nature where overwhelming force was required to destroy the enemy to achieve military and strategic objectives.¹¹ Achieving air superiority, establishing air power as a co-equal to land power and exploiting air power’s inherent flexibility to concentrate it at a decisive point were key advantages enabled by centralized control.¹² Like most conflicts involving air power, air superiority was necessary. However, it is important to point out the context in which air superiority was gained. Air superiority for the Allied forces was not a given, it had to be wrestled from an enemy who possessed a legitimate air threat—one fully capable of gaining and maintaining air superiority for themselves. Next, the operational environment allowed combatants to identify decisive points where if you concentrated combat power it could mean the difference between success and failure. The environment favored an approach which leveraged the flexibility of air power. Air commanders were able to exploit decisive points because the nature of the fight was homogeneous or consistent across the area of operations. Thus the air commander was more likely to understand the operational pros and cons of flexibly applying air power to meet the changing needs across the area of operations. In short, the doctrine of centralized control was

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Hall, 25

¹¹ Daniel F. Baltrusaitis, *Centralized Control With Decentralized Execution: Never Divide the Fleet*, (Maxwell Air Force Base: Air University Press, 2004), 16.

¹² FM 100-20, *Command and Employment of Air Power* (July 1943), 1.

formed in a conventional operational environment, force on force on a linear battlefield—a type of fight the US has become very adept in prosecuting. Therefore, centralized control, through a single airman commander, is rooted in validity. It is understandable why airmen have doctrinally created and clung to the master tenet. Given the conditions and operational context, centralized control was a logical and pragmatic approach to fully exploit air power. The tendency of airmen to default to centralized control is warranted. Centralized control is still relevant today, however centralized control’s relevancy does not necessarily mean it is without shortcomings as this paper will show in subsequent sections.

Doctrinal History of the Centralized Control and Decentralized Execution 1954 - 2010

It is important to establish a background of post-WWII doctrine with regard to CC&DE because it serves as a foundation to evaluate and determine possible improvements. Historically, what does USAF and joint doctrine reveal about CC&DE?

In 1954, USAF doctrine’s approach to managing air operations was “**centralized overall direction and decentralized control** of operations.”¹³ In 1955, USAF doctrine describes control in context of command. When determining command relationships “control should always be placed at a level which is fully able to employ the capabilities of the forces...”¹⁴ In 1971, it changed to “aerospace forces must be **centrally allocated and directed...**” It goes on to say “**mission control and execution of specific tasks must be decentralized...**”¹⁵ In 1975 the doctrine first used the terms centralized control and decentralized execution, but adds

¹³ Air Force Manual 1-2, *United States Air Force Basic Doctrine* (April 1954), 4.

¹⁴ Air Force Manual 1-2, *United States Air Force Basic Doctrine* (April 1955).2

¹⁵ AF Manual 1-1, *Basic Aerospace doctrine of the United States Air Force* (September 1971), 2-2

coordinated effort, a third pillar deemed fundamental to aerospace operations.¹⁶ In 1984, coordinated effort is not explicitly linked to CC&DE and the dual-pronged master tenet becomes gospel for directing and executing aerospace forces.¹⁷ The 2003 version of doctrine continues to state the value of CC&DE. The language describing what has become CC&DE has been far from consistent over the years and has contributed to a culture of confusion concerning the master tenet and its relationship to command. The confusion continues today. The paper will now examine command, control and execution.

Current Doctrine and Concerns

Command

An overriding aspect to the debate over CC&DE is command. Joint Publication (JP) 1-02 defines command, “The authority that a commander in the Armed Forces lawfully exercises over subordinates by virtue of rank or assignment. Command includes the authority and responsibility for effectively using available resources and for planning the employment of organizing, directing, coordinating, and **controlling** military forces for the accomplishment of assigned mission. It also includes responsibility for health welfare, morale, and discipline of assigned personnel.”¹⁸ There is confusion over the relationship between command and control. The terms are mistakenly used interchangeably.¹⁹

Control is inherent to command, but they are different. Command has to do with **organizational** issues. For example, should a single airman command air assets or should it be divided between commanders? Control has to do with **operational** issues, such as whether the

¹⁶ AF Manual 1-1, *Basic Aerospace Doctrine of the United States Air Force* (January 1975), 2-2

¹⁷ AF Manual 1-1, *Basic Aerospace Doctrine of the United States Air Force* (March 1984), 2-20&2-21

¹⁸ Joint Publication 1-02, *DoD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* (April 12 as amended through 19 Aug 2009), http://www.dtic.mil/dod_dictionary/data/c/01087.html, (accessed 5 December 2009)

¹⁹ Baltrusaitis, 6.

single commander should centrally control the air assets or “allow decentralized control so that lower echelon commanders can develop and implement plans in accordance with JFACC [Joint Force Air Component Commander] intent.”²⁰ Command and control are distinct. It is clear from doctrine that control can be delegated, whereas command cannot. Just as the commander can delegate authority but not responsibility, a commander can delegate control but not command. Command is the ability to give orders. Control is implementing those orders. Even though military terminology has tended to put them together, they are two distinct things. Since control is inherent to command, why does the USAF master tenet focus on centralized control instead of centralized command?

The following excerpt from a proposed revision in USAF doctrine continues the USAF’s long-standing focus on and fascination with control. “Centralized control empowers the JFACC to respond to changes in the operational environment.”²¹ Surely the JFACC is the commander; he or she does not need control to be empowered. It is the element of command and **not** the element of control that should be emphasized. This muddled interpretation of the relationship between command and control may very well be a major source of confusion, and why airmen and their sister-services struggle to correctly understand the USAF’s master tenet. He is empowered because he is the commander. USAF doctrine seems to have placed the emphasis on a part (control) rather than the whole (command).

Control

JP 1-02, *DoD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, defines control in **two ways**...at the operational and tactical levels. At the operational level, it is defined as

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ AFDD 1(Draft Revision), *Air Force Basic Doctrine*. (Projected release date-1 April 2010).

“Organizing and employing commands and forces, assigning tasks, designating objectives, and giving authoritative direction necessary to accomplish the mission.”²² Tactical control is defined as “detailed direction and control of movements or maneuvers within the operational area necessary to accomplish missions or tasks assigned.”²³

Air and space operations doctrine, both Air Force and Joint, define control from a centralized perspective, espousing centralized control as the best way to conduct air operations. AFDD 1, *Air Force Basic Doctrine* defines centralized control as “the planning, direction, prioritization, synchronization, integration, and deconfliction of air and space capabilities to achieve the objectives of the joint force commander.”²⁴ JP 3-30, *Command and Control for Joint Air Operations*, also offers the virtues of centralized control. For example, it states that centralized control adds “coherence, guidance and organization to the air effort and the ability to focus the tremendous impact of air capabilities wherever needed across the theater of operations.”²⁵

As beneficial as doctrine portrays centralized control, JP 3-30 implies there are other ways to control joint air operations by including the statement “Joint air operations are normally conducted using centralized control.”²⁶ However, there is no explanation of what “other than normal” might look like in practice. Effectively, doctrine views centralized control as not merely the best, but the only way to control air and space forces. Since current doctrine does not go into any detail of how to control air operations other than centrally, one could assume that the conditions that would warrant something other than centralized control have never occurred

²² Joint Publication 1-02, *DoD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* (April 12 as amended through 19 Aug 2009), http://www.dtic.mil/dod_dictionary/data/t/05347.html (accessed 5 December 2009)

²³ Joint Publication 1-02, *DoD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* (April 12 as amended through 19 Aug 2009), http://www.dtic.mil/dod_dictionary/data/o/03914.html (accessed 5 December 2009)

²⁴ AFDD 1, *Air Force Basic Doctrine* (November 2003), 28.

²⁵ Joint Publication 3-30, *Command and Control of Joint Operations*, (5 June 2003), vii-viii.

²⁶ Joint Publication 3-30, *Command and Control of Joint Operations*, (5 June 2003), vii

(since doctrine is based on best practices during operations) or at least have not occurred enough to warrant inclusion into the USAF's codified system of best practices. As will be discussed later, this is not the case.

It is clear that within US doctrine there are differences in how control is viewed. JP 1-02 is flexible in that it makes allowances that there can be effective control of forces at the operational **and** tactical levels. Though not explicitly mentioned, this would include air and space forces. Whereas air and space operations doctrine, JP 3-30 and AFDD 1, speak of effective control only in the context of the operational (centralized) level.

Decentralized Execution

At first glance, doctrine regarding decentralized execution seems more unified and less confusing than either command or control. AFDD 1, JP 1-02 and JP 3-30 define execution in terms of decentralization. The doctrine does not explicitly define what execution is, but rather what decentralized execution is. AFDD1, JP 1-02 and JP 3-30 characterize decentralized execution as “delegation of execution authority.” However, AFDD-1 and JP 3-30 offer more detail. For example, JP 3-30 and AFDD 1 cite “decentralized execution helps achieve effective span of control and flexibility to deal with changes and uncertainty.”²⁷ Although execution seems straightforward, it is not.

“Current AF doctrine fails to adequately and consistently define the central terms of command, control and execution. This causes major weaknesses in the debate over command, control and execution concepts because there is no agreed upon definition of the terms.”²⁸ This

²⁷ JP 3-30, I-3; AFDD 1, 28

²⁸ Baltrusaitis, 5

has led to varying interpretations. “What control is to one may be execution to another.”²⁹ Likewise what may be centralized at one echelon of the organization could be viewed as decentralization to another? For example, the author recently asked career AF senior space officers about the nature of space operations with respect to control and execution. One concluded space operated under decentralized command and centralized execution (notice the word control was not used) while another believed space conformed to centralized control decentralized execution.³⁰ In another example; the letter “C” in AWACS (Airborne Warning and Control System), a common reference to the E-3 Sentry, stands for control. To battle manager crewmembers, this is an accurate functional description of what they do at the tactical level. However, the Combined Air and Space Operations Center (CAOC) may view those same activities, from the operational level, as decentralized execution.

The doctrinal analysis offers insight into the arguments over centralized control decentralized execution, but it doesn’t answer all the questions. In fact it raises an important one: Can something other than CC&DE be a better option for air and space operations? When one considers this question through the lens of differing operational environments, it adds clarity.

One Size Does Not Fit All

There are weaknesses with the master tenet. It is not the optimal approach for every situation—it is necessary but not sufficient to overcome the vast diversity of challenges posed by air power employment across the spectrum of operations. The following focuses on the centralized control half of the master tenet equation.

²⁹ Lt Col Michael Kometer, *Command in Air War: Centralized Versus Decentralized Control of Combat Air Power* (Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama: Air University Press, 2007), 23

³⁰ Non attributed comments

FM 100-20 represented the best way to use air power—one might say an optimization—based on the operational environment of WWII. However, the conditions which shaped and led to centralized control are not universal. One could reason, then, given different operational circumstances and conditions, centralized control may not be the optimal approach in conducting air operations. This paper established that control is a subset of command. Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that ideas on command could also apply to control. Martin Van Crevald writes about varied contexts and the impact these variations have on so called immutable laws of command. He puts it this way, “Command being so intimately bound up with numerous other factors that shape war, the pronouncement of one or more “master principles” that should govern its structure and the way it operates is impossible.”³¹

What about other operational environments? What are the differences and how might they affect the conduct of air and space operations? Is CC&DE right for every situation...a counterinsurgency for instance? “The fundamentals of command in conventional war may require modification, even inversion, in a counterinsurgency environment where purely military factors are less important than psychological and political ones.”³² General James N. Mattis, Commander, U.S. Joint Forces Command offers his opinion of the current counterinsurgency in Afghanistan. “Times are changing. We are having to decentralize, in terms of decision making, decentralize in terms of assets...its wasteful but highly effective.”³³ He goes on to characterize the type of war we are in as “not the American way of war...it’s outside our comfort zone. We have to overcome this as our reality meets the reality on the ground. Not the reality as we want it

³¹ Martin van Crevald, *Command in War*, (Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1995), 261.

³² van Crevald, 262.

³³ Gen James N. Mattis, Speech to Air War College, 15 September 2009

to be but the reality as it exists.”³⁴ So what is the reality of this war? What are the conditions which make it different from the conditions under which centralized control was forged?

The contextual divergence is staggering. First, counterinsurgencies are limited in nature and the use of overwhelming force can possibly cause negative political fallout which can be detrimental to achieving military and strategic objectives. The US and its allies had air superiority by default...the enemy posed no significant air capability. Next, the notion of a decisive point or points where massing combat capability decides the outcome is simply not applicable in a counterinsurgency. If massing of air power is less advantageous, then the mechanism (centralized control) which enables the massing of air power is also less advantageous. The current insurgency in Afghanistan is comprised of many and varied mini-insurgencies—each with different challenges. No two are alike, requiring tailored approaches. Afghanistan is a nation that is not really a nation. Instead it is a collection of ethnic tribes. It becomes very difficult for a single commander to understand interrelationships between the mini-insurgencies as capability is moved between local insurgencies as opposed to the homogeneity of the North Africa operation in WWII. It is reasonable to conclude this type of operational environment may benefit from an increased level of decentralization. In fact, the land forces have done just that by “pushing” the planning down to the Division and, in some cases, to the Brigade.

One could argue the shift towards decentralization in response to the diverse nature of counterinsurgencies is understandable for land forces but does not apply to air and space power. This view is short-sided and does not take into account many instances where the USAF has departed from its master tenet based on the conditions. For example, “Air Force participation in operations Northern Watch, Southern Watch, Allied Force and Deliberate Force emphasize the

³⁴ Ibid.

use of centralized execution to manage the application of air power because of political influence and force protection requirements for coalition aircraft. In each case, the operation's small scale, limited objectives...allowed the C/JFACC to pay individual attention to the execution of the air effort and thereby to achieve the desired political and military objectives."³⁵

The context and environment influences choices on how to employ air power. The experiences of Lt Col Cliff Hinote while serving as chief of strategy for the CENTCOM CFACC, including surge operations in Iraq, convinced him that asking five questions can help determine how air power is best controlled and executed: 1) What is the nature of the operation; 2) Where should flexibility be preserved; 3) How many assets are available; 4) What is the geographical range of effects and; 5) Who has the best situational awareness?³⁶ Properly answering and appropriately responding to the above questions is necessary but not sufficient for improved command and control. Trust and cooperation between components is also critical.

Lack of Trust and Cooperation

The AF doctrinal approach to centralized control coupled with Army trends in further decentralizing planning have made it more difficult for air and ground planners to cooperate. A key characteristic of centralized control is the airman's approach to planning. Significant planning occurs centrally at the CAOC, although detailed planning does occur at lower levels upon receipt of the air tasking order.³⁷ Historically the Army's approach has been more decentralized through mission-type orders. This different approach has led to USAF deficiencies

³⁵ Baltrusaitis, 28

³⁶ Lt Col Clint Hinote, *Centralized Control and Decentralized Execution: A Catchphrase in Crisis?* (Maxwell Air Force Base Alabama: University Press, March 2009), 59-62

³⁷ The five deployable Combined Air and Space Operations Centers (CAOCs) are a direct result of centralized doctrine.

in planning entities for the Army at every echelon.³⁸ When the critical Army planning occurs at the Corps level, the USAF's doctrinal approach can handle that. This approach was appropriate and worked relatively well when Army planning at the Corps level heavily impacted and shaped subordinate echelons as in Operation DESERT STORM, for example.³⁹ The counterinsurgencies in Iraq and Afghanistan, however, have caused the Army to change. The insurgencies in Iraq and Afghanistan can be described as made up of differing insurgencies—each with its own specifics requiring its own approach. A senior leader at Air War College described the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq as not two conflicts but twelve. The implication being that they are so different they should be considered as separate “fights.”⁴⁰ The components no longer operate in a coordinated fashion as they did during Operation Iraqi Freedom Phase I. Instead of operating in support of the Joint Force Commander's grand scheme of maneuver, it is now “a highly decentralized fight, driven largely by independent actions of lower level tactical commanders...”⁴¹ What does all this mean to the air component?

The absence of robust air planning capability at lower Army echelons results in Airmen not providing air expertise where it matters. Often ground commanders do not realize all the benefits air power could provide because air isn't there to be an integral part of the planning. Sometimes this can cause ill-conceived and poorly executed operations. “The air component needs to commit to developing the necessary resources to allow for the full degree of air-ground integration to occur at the lowest planning levels required for effective combat operations.”⁴²

³⁸ The Army's planning echelons include the Corps, Division, Brigade and Company levels.

³⁹ Lt Gen Ret Eugene D Santarelli, Comments During Command and Control of Air and Space Power Forces course, (Maxwell Air Force Base: October 2009)

⁴⁰ Maj Gen Maurice H. Forsyth, Comments During Air Command and Control Workshop, (Maxwell Air Force Base, 13 October 2009)

⁴¹ Air Force / Marine Corps Tiger Team, *Air Force / Marine Corps Tiger Team Trip Report*, (Mar 2008), 4.

⁴² Lt Col William E Pinter, *Air-Ground Integration in the 21st Century: Improving Air Force Combat Capabilities and Theater Command and Control for Major Combat Operations and Irregular Warfare*, (Maxwell AFB Alabama: February 2009), 12.

Operation Anaconda highlighted operational weaknesses that can occur due to, among other things, a lack of integrated planning between air and ground forces.⁴³

There is another negative; missed opportunities to plan together are missed opportunities to build trust between air and ground components. The more the Army decentralizes, the more profound the issue becomes. With planning by land forces occurring at lower levels it has made it even more difficult for the air and land to plan together in order to best leverage what air power can contribute. This has resulted in a perceived wider divide between air and ground planners.

Lt Col Clint Hinote, who served as CAOC chief of strategy at the CENTAF CAOC commented that “not being in the mud” with the ground planners limits opportunities to build trust. There are not many shared experiences between the air and ground...there is no sense of trust between air planners at the CAOC and ground planners at the many decentralized fights which are going in.”⁴⁴ This general sentiment is shared by Lt Col Michael Kometer, who also served as Chief of Strategy in the Al Udeid CAOC.⁴⁵

Conclusions and Recommendations

From the analysis above flow three broad conclusions. The first is that the master tenet is incomplete; it does not address the variety of ways air power and space power has been managed. Differing operational contexts have led to different, but valid ways to conduct air and space power operations; for the most part they are not addressed in USAF doctrine. The second main conclusion is that USAF doctrine, although incomplete, is still relevant. As long as there

⁴³ Headquarters United States Air Force, AF/XOL, *Operation Anaconda: An Airpower Perspective*, (7 Feb 2005), 3-10.

⁴⁴ Lt Col Clint Hinote, Comments During Air Command and Control Workshop (Maxwell AFB: 13 October 2009)

⁴⁵ Lt Col Michael Kometer, Comments During Air Command and Control Workshop (Maxwell AFB: 13 October 2009)

remains the possibility of the US engaging in major combat operations, CC&DE is an option. Third, confusion abounds over centralization, decentralization, command, control and execution. The terms' varied interpretations and how they are related reflect the profound complexities associated with conducting air and space operations. The author submits the following adjustment as an improvement the master tenet.

Centralized Command, flexible control and flexible execution seems to be a sound basis from which to articulate air power philosophy. The new and improved master tenet unequivocally places the emphasis on command. It recognizes centralized command is the most likely constant across the spectrum of conducting air and space operations. Control is inherent to command, and by placing the emphasis on command the confusion over how they relate can be lessened if not totally eliminated.

Control and execution, however, need to be flexible. Sometimes it may be best to centrally control and execute (nuclear deterrence mission), other times it may be best to control and execute in a decentralized fashion (counterinsurgency operations). Sometimes it may fall somewhere in between. The issue of centralization and decentralization are matters of degree when applied to control and execution. "Control of air power has varied among different types of wars and even among different missions within the same war."⁴⁶ Gen Short attests to this as he recounted operations during Allied Force, "In the same ATO [air tasking order] some missions were centrally controlled and executed and others were centrally controlled with decentralized execution."⁴⁷ Although useful, this simple tweak to the tenet is not enough.

Doctrine has to address—in detail—what is meant by flexible, in the form of a supplement that presents a contextual analysis by explaining the differing operational

⁴⁶ Kometer, 17.

⁴⁷ Lt Gen Ret Michael Short, Comments During Command and Control of Air and Space Power course (Maxwell Air Force Base: 9 December 2009)

circumstances and their impact in determining the best approach to conducting air operations. This would help airmen better understand the centralization issue that dominates control and execution arguments. It would help in understanding the complex interplay between the “pluses and the minuses” of centralization or decentralization based on experience. In short, it would add much-needed muscle, bone and academic rigor to the current straw man of CC&DE.

Airmen have a hard time articulating beyond the bumper sticker partly because the USAF has failed to systematically document these complexities and their all-important implications. The airman’s understanding is stifled. He lacks in-depth comprehension of command and control of air and space operations. USAF doctrine penetrates only surface-deep and leaves much to be learned through trial and error or word of mouth. It is time the USAF adjusted its master tenet to reflect those complexities. If it continues to allow the doctrine to be what amounts to a caricature of reality, its airman’s ability to explain the doctrine will also be a caricature. Sadly, that amounts to nothing more than dogma.

Glossary of Terms

AFDD	Air Force Doctrine Document
ASC	Air-support Control
AWACS	Airborne Warning and Control System
CAOC	Combined Air and Space Operations Center
CC&DE	Centralized Control Decentralized Execution
CENTCOM	Central Command
FM	Field Manual
JFACC	Joint Force Air Component Commander
JP	Joint Publication
NATAF	Northwest African Tactical Air Force
UK	United Kingdom
USAF	United States Air Force
WWII	World War II

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